



State Of Connecticut

SENATE
STATE CAPITOL
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Testimony of

Senator Donald E. Williams, Jr.
Senate President Pro Tempore

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Judiciary Committee

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for allowing us to testify today on S.B. 364, An Act Concerning Traffic Stop Information.

Racial profiling is the practice of treating individuals as suspects based on characteristics like race or religion, rather than actual criminal conduct. Racial profiling can not and should not be tolerated in our state. As elected officials we must ensure the equal treatment and equal protection of all of our citizens. Profiling is both wrong and ineffective:

- ***It violates fundamental rights of fairness and equality.*** By treating them differently from "mainstream Americans", it effectively turns communities of color into second-class citizens.
- ***It diminishes trust between law enforcement and affected communities.*** Those who have been profiled and may be witnesses or victims of crimes, such as hate crimes or domestic violence, become more hesitant to reach out to police in times of need.
- ***It diverts limited law enforcement resources away from finding actual criminal and national security threats.*** In many cases, law enforcement misses the real criminals by focusing on race- or religion-based profiles rather than looking for signs of unusual activity based on individualized behavior.

We are all well aware of the report issued by the U.S. Department of Justice finding that the East Haven Police Department violated federal law by systematically discriminating against Latinos. The report indicated that the department "engages in discriminatory policing against Latinos, including [targeting them] for discriminatory traffic

enforcement, treating Latino drivers more harshly than non-Latino drivers after a traffic stop, and intentionally and woefully failing to design and implement internal systems of control that would identify, track and prevent such misconduct."

In addition to this example of systematic profiling by a particular police department, a recent analysis by The Hartford Court of our traffic stop data as collected by the African American Affairs Commission revealed troubling information about disparities in the treatment of motorists who were pulled over. In response to these recent events and the continued non-compliance of existing state law, I am here today because **we must strengthen our racial profiling law so that Connecticut motorists are not treated differently because of the color of their skin.**

There are a number of provisions in the bill that I support and that are necessary for a more workable law.

First, current law requires police departments to collect and provide annual data on traffic stops, offenses, dispositions, and complaints of discriminatory stops. **We can make the process easier by standardizing the forms used by departments to collect and report the traffic stop data.**

Second, traffic stop data is currently collected by the African American Affairs Commission. The AAAC has collected the data since 2003 however a lack of financial or staff resources has prevented the Commission from ever analyzing the data. **We can strengthen the law by requiring the Office of Policy and Management and the Criminal Justice Information System Governing Board (CJIS) to collect and analyze the data.**

It is extremely troubling that of the 92 municipal police departments, only 27 are in compliance with our current racial profiling law, according to the African American Affairs Commission. By designating OPM as the state entity that ensures compliance and enforcement with the *Alvin Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act*, we enhance the ability to collect and analyze the traffic stop data.

Third, **we can strengthen the law by allowing motorists to report complaints of suspected racial profiling.**

I believe SB 364 can go further.

While current law requires police departments to adopt written policies prohibiting discriminatory stops, searches and detentions, **we can strengthen the law by requiring police departments to submit their written policies to OPM.**

In addition to allowing motorists to make a complaint of racial profiling, **we can strengthen the law by enabling CHRO to receive and investigate a complaint as well as issue an annual report to OPM on the number of complaints that they receive.**

Finally, we can strengthen the law by requiring police departments to re-train their officers when data illustrates the prevalence of racial profiling.

There are many fine police officers throughout our state. Let us be clear that this legislation is not intended to be antagonistic to our local police departments. Rather, we must ensure that officers are aware that either unconscious bias or deliberate racism has no place in the law enforcement community and we must do all that we can to address it when it is occurring. We must ensure that we do not create or sanction an environment that puts the community at odds with the police. As we strive for a safe environment for all our residents, we must ensure that groups of people do not feel targeted by the police, by virtue of their race.